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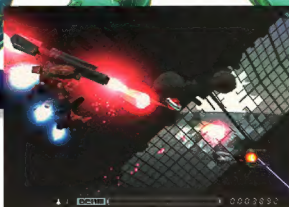
TOTAL GAMER

MARCH 2004 FREE



CRYSTAL CHRONICLES HEAD TO HEAD

R-TYPE:FINAL



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Editorial



In this issue of *Total Gamer*, we've made a few changes.

Some of these changes are behind the scenes; I got a new pair of pants, for example, while Steven Stoner, our venerable art director is sporting new shoes if I'm not very much mistaken. Some of the changes are visible within the pages of the magazine and should elicit more interest from readers than our clothing or footwear choices.

First and perhaps most noticeable, we've added the N-Gage to our roster of review platforms. Nokia's first kick at the handheld can has received a pretty bad rap from gamers and games media alike. While the unit is a long way from perfection, a lot of the criticism levelled at it seems to be more a result of scepticism than experience.

What the N-Gage does wrong has been discussed and debated since the first units landed in the hands of gamers on the worldwide launch last year. The units cardinal sin is perhaps not offering a quick and simple way to change games, which come on memory cards that are tucked under the battery in the back. To switch games, users have to perform microsurgery, removing some of the platform's innards to play something new. The N-gage is the butt of a lot of jokes, some of which are unfair. While mistakes were made, perhaps out of a lack of real understanding for what gamers want in a handheld system and how much they are willing to pay for it, there are some solid ideas at work that make the N-Gage worth – at the very least – a look.

Allowing for head to head multiplayer over Bluetooth or existing cell phone networks is the most distinguishing factor of the N-Gage. By augmenting a cell phone and gaming platform, the N-Gage has functions that no other handheld past or present can touch. Also, by putting games on MMC cards, the N-Gage has more potential data capacity than the ubiquitous GBA and its graphics are second to none in current handheld platforms; about on par with early PSone games.

Whether you think the N-Gage is destined for success or doomed to failure, we hope you find these new reviews interesting and informative.

Let us know what you think about anything in the pages of *Total Gamer* and we may print your letter. Email andrew@totalgamer.ca.

Enjoy the issue,
Andrew Moore-Crispin

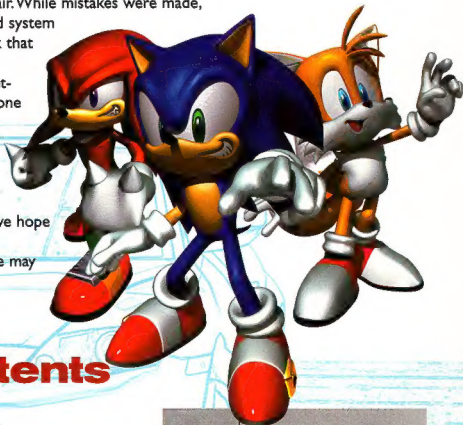


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Total Gamer, with numerous GBAs and link cables in tow, organized a four-player test of Square's latest, *Final Fantasy: Crystal Chronicles*. Check out page 9 for the head to head reviews.

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- 0 Star: Coaster/doorstop material.
- 1 Star: Played it for awhile before setting our coffees on it.
- 2 Star: Playable, but lacking.
- 3 Star: Try before you buy.
- 4 Star: Excellent, but not worth an award.
- 5 Star: If you can afford one game, this is the one.



MADE IN

BY MARC SALTEMAN



CANADA



The following is the latest game news from the Great White North.

Spidey seen in BC?

The 800-pound gorilla known as Electronic Arts (EA) has recently signed a deal with another 800-pound gorilla – comic book publisher Marvel Enterprises – to create a series of unique fighting games. The premise? These titles will pit original EA characters against Marvel's celebrated superheroes, such as Spider-Man and X-Men. On the flipside, Marvel has committed to licensing these new EA characters to publish comic books based on them. This business agreement lets EA Canada – the Burnaby, BC-based developers of the upcoming fighting games (the first of which is due out in late 2005) – to have access to more than 100 Marvel superheroes, with the exception of the Hulk and Punisher as both are already licensed to Vivendi Universal games and THQ, respectively. Activision will retain its existing Spider-Man and X-Men licenses, however, though the company can only create non-fighting game titles.

Jade Empire buzz growing

Riding high on the success of *Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic*, the development team at Edmonton's BioWare are hard at work on their next "masterpiece" (well, we wouldn't expect anything less from them). Here's the skinny: *Jade Empire* will be a role-playing game exclusive to the Xbox. It will take place in a mythological China, a fantasy world with powerful magic and floating cities. Players create n' customize a new character before setting out to pursue agents who can help do your bidding (much of the story and missions remain under wraps). It is said players will be able to bring back a variety of defeated monsters to a central home base who must then serve as guards. Battles will take place in real-time, opposed to the turn-based fighting in BioWare's *Neverwinter Nights* and the hybrid style found in *Knights*. Release date is still TBD, but be sure to bookmark bioware.com to keep tabs on the game in progress.



Rogers inks with Gameloft

Rogers AT&T Wireless has signed a distribution agreement to provide its customers with access to Gameloft (gameloft.com) games on their wireless devices. For a one-time fee of \$3 to \$7 per title, Rogers AT&T Wireless customers can download any one of Gameloft's leading games, including (big breath here): *Gula's Tale*, *Rail Rider*, *Earth Invasion*, *Marcel Desailly Pro Soccer*, *Nightmare Creatures*, *Planet Zero*, *Prince of Persia: Harem Adventures*, *Prince of Persia: Sands of Time*, *Rayman 3*, *Rayman Bowling*, *Rayman Golf*, *Siberian Strike I & II*, *Skate and Slam*, *Speed Devils*, *Tom Clancy's Rainbow Six 3 Raven Shield*, *Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell*, *Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell Extended Ops*, *XIII*, *Block Breaker* and *Solitaire*. The titles are available to cell phone users who have Java-enabled wireless devices of the following types: Nokia (3100, 3300, 3590, 3595, 3600, 6100, 6800, 6310i, or N-Gage), and Motorola T720. Visit rogers.com/games for more info.

Groovy games cometh



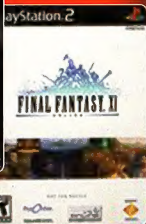
Groove Games, a Toronto-based publisher of PC games, and Jarhead Games, a seasoned independent development studio, are banding together to create a series of value-priced computer games. The first will be *Marine Sharpshooter II*, a follow-up to a tactical action title that challenges players to thwart a terrorist plot to build and detonate a nuclear bomb on American soil. "Bringing quality to value games is an obvious yet difficult venture; the key ingredients for success being a talented, committed development team and a flexible, market-focused publisher with an eye for fun games," says Jon Walsh, president of Groove Games. In *Marine Sharpshooter II*, players will go deep into the African jungles on a mission to stop a rebel plot to overthrow the local government. More information and screen grabs are available at groovegames.com.

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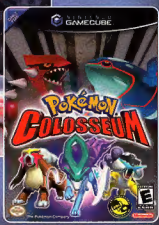


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nfl Street

Publisher: EA Sports Developer: Tiburon All platforms



The phrase "take it to the street" has perhaps worked its way into the morning motivational cheer over at Electronic Arts.

Following up on the success of *NBA Street* (but not actually descended from the same idea, according to senior product manager Tom Goedde) *NFL Street* allows gamers – football fans or not – to play seven-on-seven football where flare and finesse takes something of a back seat to nickel D, shotgun formation or other strategic play types.

Unlimited pitchouts, trick plays, obstacles and showboating make the game less about football strategy and more about football mayhem. Similarly, removing

field goals in favour of conversions after a touchdown means the timid likely won't last too long.

Adding flair to a play by holding down the showboat button while passing, running, catching or tackling earns points that build the Gamebreaker metre. Once filled, gamers hit a button to give their players superhuman speed and ability on the drive. Gamebreakers can make the difference between running the ball in for the game winning TD on offence or turning the ball over on downs. Similarly, using the Gamebreaker on defence can mean the difference between stopping the game winning drive and retiring to the locker room.

Taking the players out of an official NFL stadium (though they are real NFL players) and putting them in street clothes and eliminating hitting after a play, *NFL Street* avoids the licensing trouble that Midway's *NFL Blitz* franchise found itself in after the

NFL took issue with some elements of the game.

That said, *Street* struggles to maintain an Everyone rating from the ESRB; the much-hyped EA TRAX feature offers up a number of hip hop and hip hop inspired tracks, some of which are so heavily censored as to lose any and all meaning. I question the logic of choosing music that has to be cut to shreds at a sacrifice to the song and any meaning it once had in order to keep the ESRB from slapping a higher age suggestion on the package.

In single player, gamers progress through the ranks, unlocking stadiums, upgrade points and new outfits for players. However, two-player is where most of the fun in *NFL Street* can be found. Online play sweetens the pot somewhat for PS2 gamers.

NFL Street makes good on its promise of a highly stylized but instantly recognizable game of football.

— Andrew Moore-Crispin



Urban artist Justin Bua

www.justinbua.com

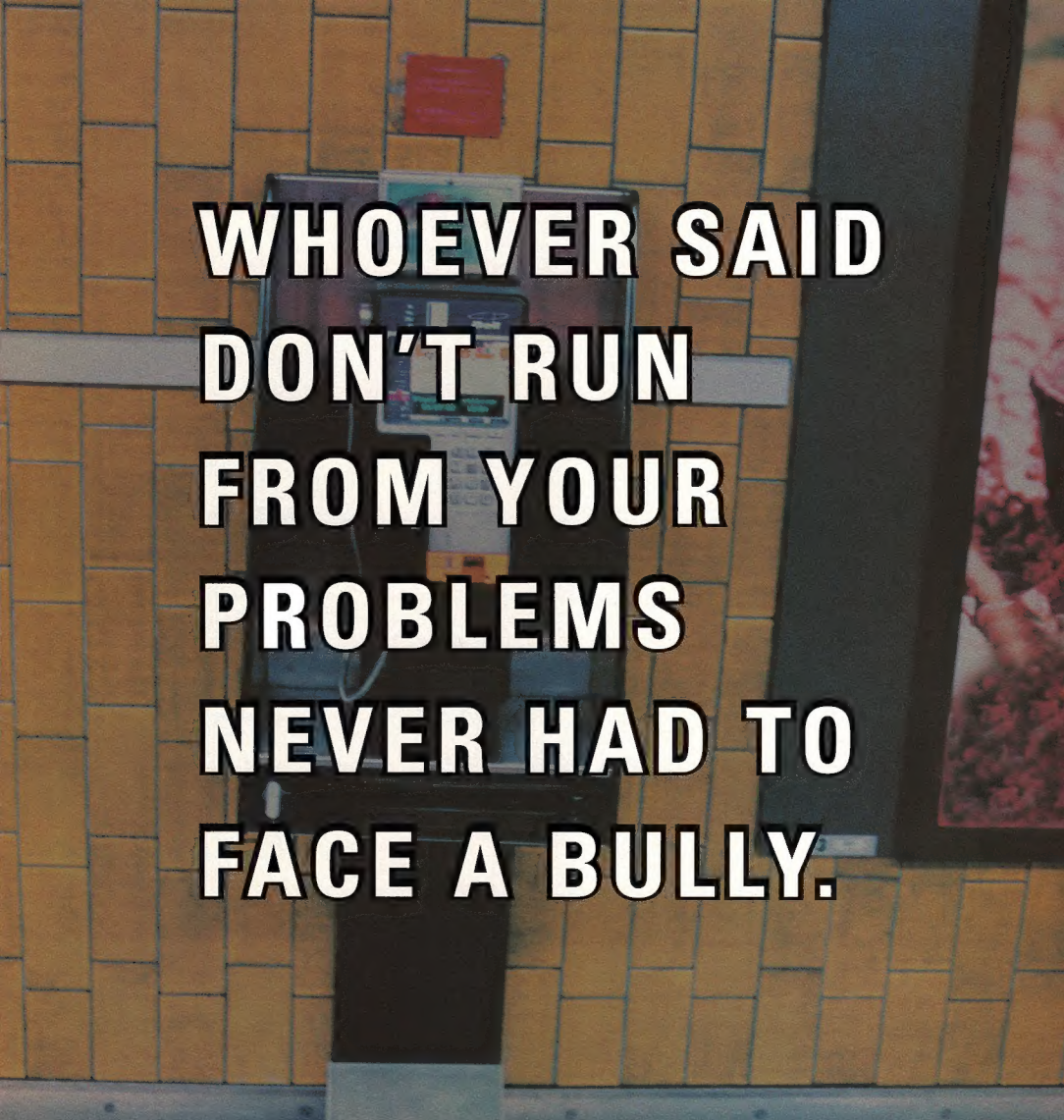
Justin Bua is among those leading the charge toward capitalizing on videogames (among other new media) as the latest vehicle for artists. In looking to create a new culture for street football, *NFL Street* allows Bua to bring his trademark impressionistic urban style to an audience who otherwise may not see it.

While character design, level backgrounds and the overall look of the gameplay segments of the game are a function of the core design team, EA showcases Bua's work and the work of eight up and coming artists on load screens and in the game's introductory sequence.

"Art is there, art is already being created (in game design, graphics, backgrounds, characters etc)," Bua says. "Integrating it like they did in *NFL Street*, with the load screens and the mural at the beginning, that kind of stuff is really good."

Art has kind of lost a medium to show itself; it's really insular, it's for the rich and affluent, it's not for the common man. If we can bring art to the forefront, which is what's being attempted here, then that makes all the difference in the world."





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Sonic Heroes

Publisher: Sega Developer: Sonic Team



Many *Sonic the Hedgehog* fans were let down when Sega's spiky blue-haired mascot made the transition from 2D to 3D because the frenzied racing was traded for a slower-paced action/adventure.

If you were one of those disappointed players, you'll be pleased to know Sega has returned to its roots with *Sonic Heroes*. While not without its faults, it is reminiscent of the frantic high-speed game-play found on the Sega Genesis – and with a little strategy thrown in for good measure.

This time around, Sonic and his pals Knuckles and Tails must stop the wicked Dr. Eggman from building a powerful weapon. The trio has just three days to find the elusive scientist and thwart his plans to "bring the world to his knees."

But this is just one side of the story to *Sonic Heroes*, as the game lets you pick one of four unique teams, each with its own agenda and band of characters.

For all teams, players must strategically rotate between each of the three characters to choose an appropriate leader for a given situation: one character will excel in speed (e.g. Sonic), another member specializes in power (e.g. Knuckles) and the third can fly (e.g. Tails).

And boy is this game fast – speeding through the 14 bizarre worlds requires quick reflexes to prevent falling off the narrow, twisting tracks that hang in mid-air.



Sonic Heroes does have shortcomings, though, such as graphics that aren't on par with today's titles, and some finicky camera angles that can obscure the view.

That said, *Sonic Heroes* is a good pick for fans of "twitch" games, and especially for those who remember playing these coveted mascot games in the early '90s.

— Marc Saltzman

Conflict: Desert Storm II — Back to Baghdad

Publisher: Gathering Developer: Pivotal Games

Set in the aftermath of the Gulf War in 1991, *Conflict: Desert Storm II* picks up where its predecessor left off, and sees you controlling the same four special operatives (either American Delta or British SAS) who must go back behind enemy lines and put a lid on Iraq's weapons of mass destruction.

Since all the missions from the previous game were purely hypothetical, the developers pretty much had carte blanche to put together a war sim that could look authentic, even though it didn't necessarily have to be because there's no real story to follow. Though the game was touted as a desperate search-and-destroy for Iraqi chemical arms, there are actually only two missions that have anything to do with unconventional weapons.

The control and command scheme remain relatively unchanged, and the enemy AI has definitely gone through an upgrade, which is a big reason why the 10 missions in the game are very long and tough. The co-operative play that's offered is also a bright spot, giving up to four players the chance to really work as a team and get the job done.

That said, the issue that dogs this game is undoubtedly the lack of any real replay value, since there's not much to keep you entertained beyond the 10 missions.

The unfortunate thing about *Conflict: Desert Storm II* is that, like the original, it lacks personality. There's no real difference between the American and British units other than slightly different uniforms, and the lack of a cohesive storyline means there's no real payoff at the end of the game.

— Ted Kritsonis



Monster 4X4: Masters of Metal

Publisher/ Developer: Ubisoft

Monster 4X4 is the B movie of video games. Laughable cut scenes, over the top characters and a hackneyed story tie together the surprisingly fun racing and destruction elements.

The basic premise puts gamers behind the wheel of their own truck, as they climb the ranks of the Monster Truck circuit in stadium races while earning extra money by competing in non-officially sanctioned checkpoint races and win acclaim and some extra pocket money by pulling off stunts before stadium audiences.

Without a doubt, the best part of the game is the unofficial races that dot checkpoints around a fairly expansive level. It's up to drivers to decide the quickest and best route to the next checkpoint, avoiding trees, other obstacles and racers, collecting cash icons and catching air to win the race and the cash purse.

While *Monster 4X4* certainly won't be winning any awards for innovation, there is some fun to be had, at least for *Monster Truck* fans.

— AM-C



FINAL FANTASY CRYSTAL CHRONICLES

GAMECUBE™

Publisher: Nintendo Developer: SquareSoft

The weekend after the game's release *Total Gamer* organized a four-player test of the heavily multiplayer-focused *Final Fantasy: Crystal Chronicles*. We started a new caravan and made it through one year of game time in the about six hours of play.

Andrew's take

If you're anything like me (that is to say, chronically impatient and easily frustrated) co-op multiplayer – despite all its benefits and excellent implementation – is likely to kill a few friendships. The good news is, it's probably worth it.

Towns in the *Final Fantasy* world are essentially islands, separated by streams of "miasma," a life draining force that pollutes the world and is held at bay by protective crystals in each town. Once a year, caravans must set out from each town to collect enough myrrh in a chalice to renew their respective crystals. One party member has to carry the chalice at all times and as long as party members are within the aura the chalice casts, they are protected from the miasma.

What we find is an interesting if subdued plot weaved with short cut scenes and brief retrospective verse. On making their way through the dungeon crawl levels (for want of a better term), gamers defeat all manner of enemies using magic, melee and focused attacks to collect character upgrades, magicite, gil (money) and other items. RPG accoutrements are present but somewhat subdued.

In multiplayer, while the focus is on cooperative play, there are elements of competition among the party. Each player has a specific goal i.e. use spells to defeat enemies, don't cure yourself or take magic damage. Dungeon levels all end with a generally challenging boss battle which must be won in order to collect one drop of myrrh. Three drops are required to fill the chalice and complete a year.

Confusion sometimes reigns in multiplayer as four players try to fight enemies, keep within the chalice's aura and coordinate attacks by communicating with each other while adventuring. With each party member seeing a different view on his GBA – one with a detailed dungeon map, one with an enemy heads up, one whose display shows the enemy's weakness etc – players get a new spin-on multiplayer, and a very effective new spin at that.

— Andrew Moore-Crispin

★★★★

Chad's take

When Square's *Final Fantasy* franchise forsook Nintendo in favour of Sony in the mid-nineties, it completely reinvented itself, setting new standards for presentation and storytelling in the RPG genre. It seems only fitting, then, that the series' Nintendo homecoming should be an equally extreme departure from what we have come to expect of *Final Fantasy* games developed for Sony. Don't expect lifelike character models, excessive melodrama, or complex character upgrading systems in *Crystal Chronicles*. Rather, be prepared for a much simpler action/adventure game that places an emphasis on real-time dungeon battling.

Even more daring than *Crystal Chronicles'* abandonment of turn-based fighting is its multiplayer functionality, which incorporates GBA/GameCube connectivity and allows up to four friends to explore the world together. Oddly, I found playing as a team to be more difficult than playing alone. Coordinating the efforts of four players to combine attacks, heal each other, and attempt to view and relay vital battle information from their GBAs is a challenging – though quite satisfying – exercise. The team dynamics also shed a bit of light on each player's personality. For example, who'd have thought Andrew's Little would turn out to be a slave-driving, treasure-hogging, domineering jerk, whereas my timid Selkie would be a kindly, sharing, team player always willing to sacrifice herself for the greater good?

The multiplayer mode makes *Crystal Chronicles* feel more like a *Gauntlet* game than a *Final Fantasy* game. In fact, longtime fans of the series may be disappointed to learn that very little of *Crystal Chronicles* recalls previous *Final Fantasy* titles. The cast of creatures includes moogles, chocobos and a variety of familiar-looking monsters, and some of the music is reminiscent of previous entries in the franchise, but when it comes to battling, exploring, and managing characters, almost nothing recognizable can be found.

However, with the understanding that *Crystal Chronicles* is a different breed of RPG than its *Final Fantasy* brethren, the game's deceptive depth, original story and slick visuals provide little fodder for criticism.

— Chad Sapieha

★★★★



Rise to Honor

Publisher/ Developer: SCEA



Kicking butt and taking names we like; doing it as action movie star Jet Li, well, let's just say it's a proposition no self-respecting geek could refuse. A pity then that the actor doesn't command a more respectable performance in *Rise to Honor*, a fun, but fleeting stab at mating the videogame and filmmaking industries. While enjoyable in parts, and bursting with novel ideas, ironically the program is ultimately held back from greatness by its own less than stellar production values.

Chasing after assailants, dueling with roomfuls of adversaries, dodging machine gun fire ... consider this just a small sampling of the challenges which await hero Kit Yun. Avenging the fallen underworld kingpin he once served as a bodyguard, the protagonist – played by Li – travels between Hong Kong and San Francisco, dispensing vigilante justice at whim. Visiting such savory locales as construction sites, rooftops, alleyways and even bustling kitchens, you'll help the hero in his mission, knocking foes senseless with a one-touch combat system.

With both firefights and unarmed duels handled with equal aplomb, you'll find little to complain about control-wise. Rather, it's the grainy visuals, pre-programmed hotspots and heavily scripted story which do the product an injustice. Given that many featured action sequences feel so contrived, one can't help but wonder why a simulation of

martial artistry – a graceful practice – doesn't boast a more fluid execution. However, seeing that you can strike in multiple directions, leap off walls, and invoke combo hits with relative ease, audiences will be inclined to forgive and forget.

Good for a couple afternoons' enjoyment, the product nonetheless lacks staying power.
– Scott Steinberg



Intellivision Lives!

Publisher: Grave Entertainment Developer: Various

Old timers may fondly remember Mattel's Intellivision, a console released in 1980. This compilation revives over 60 games, including classics like *Utopia*, *Shark!*, *Shark!*, *B-17* (With voices, ooh!) and *Body Slam!*, their surprisingly sophisticated wrestling game. It also contains unreleased games, histories, developer interviews and old commercials to unlock.

The compilation doesn't have the rights to all Intellivision titles. You won't find the *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons* games, or *Microsurgeon* (one of my faves). Also, the Intellivision had a 12-key controller and your PS2 doesn't. The more complex games require you to press a button to bring up a mock-up of the controller and then make a selection, or use two controllers, even if you're playing solo. Needless to say, that's awkward.

Still, you'll be surprised at how deep and fun some games are, despite their crude sounds and graphics. Oldsters, embrace the nostalgia. Young uns, check out the history lesson.

– Jason MacIsaac



Wrath Unleashed

Publisher: LucasArts Developer: The Collective

Remember that old Activision classic, *Archon*? If so, then you'll soon get the hang of *Wrath Unleashed*.

Combining turn-based strategy and action, you pick one of four gods, each one representing a different element. These gods command armies of mythical creatures – Unicorns, Djinn, Giantesses, Cyclopes and so on. You move them about a mystic landscape, trying to occupy structures such as Citadels, Gates and Mana Wats to increase your god's power. If you move on to a section occupied by an enemy creature, you duke it out in the action phase, which is like a light fighting game. You can win your battles by routing the enemy, occupying all of the important structures such as Temples, or by defeating the enemy god in combat.

The game uses a heavily modified Slayer engine (used in The Collective's *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* game). You can pull off light and heavy magic attacks, light and heavy melee attacks and each creature has a special magic power (e.g. Unicorns can teleport). You can also strafe. Like *Buffy*'s combat, this system is versatile without being overly complex.

Complaints? I do wish the load times between strategy and combat were quicker, especially since a few good combos can end a fight really quickly. A partial thumbs-up for the multiplayer support – four players can play at once, though the game does not support Xbox Live.

To The Collective: give the guys in the art department a raise. Seriously, this is one beautiful game, with imaginative takes on the mythical creature design. Gameplay wise, it strikes a good balance of action and strategy. The strategy isn't as complex as a *Heroes of Might & Magic*, and the fighting doesn't have the intricacies of *Soul Calibur II*, but *Wrath Unleashed* has enough depth to make it both interesting and entertaining.

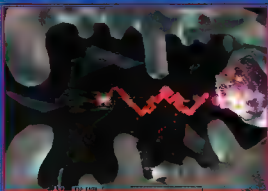
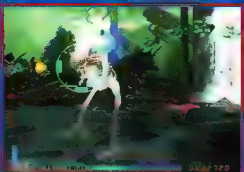
– Jason MacIsaac



R-Type: Final

Publisher: Eidos Interactive Developer: Irem Software Engineering

It's been fifteen years since the first *R-Type* game hit the arcades and, through numerous console sequels, became one of the most beloved 2D shoot-em-ups of all time. But of course, all good things must come to an end. This apparent final chapter to the series stays true to the formula: a single ship takes on the entire Bydo Empire armed with lasers that can be bolstered by collecting power-ups, and the energy ball.



By far the coolest aspect of *R-Type*, the energy ball is a device that can either latch onto the ship and absorb enemies to unleash powerful special attacks, or can be launched to dispatch enemies as a kind of independent attack-droid.

The game certainly makes an extra effort to please long-time fans of *R-Type*, with a variety of modes and options including 101 unlockable ships with tweakable stats.

It's a shame, however, that with so many ships to choose from, there are only a handful of stages to take them through.

The stages, to be fair, are graphically gorgeous: a sprawling urban metropolis, underwater ruins and a spazzed-out space level with a trippy effect that distorts the entire screen – all the while managing to give the impression of 3D depth although the ship flies along a simple two dimensional plane. The levels branch off into multiple paths as well, if certain in-game variables are met.

Unfortunately, *Final* suffers from some pretty significant slowdown, which is disappointing in a game that is coming out this late in the PlayStation 2's lifespan. The slowdown is partly to blame for *Final's* rather deliberate pacing. It's not a twitch game in the truest sense of the word, and relies on memorizing level layouts and enemy patterns more than it does raw reflexes.

The length is justified by the price – cheaper than the average PS2 disc.

– Erin Bell



Star Trek: Shattered Universe

Publisher: TDK Mediactive Developer: Starsphere Interactive

If the words *Star Trek* send shivers down your spine, you're probably already sold on the concept behind *Star Trek: Shattered Universe*.

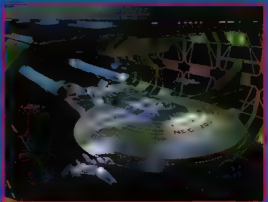
If, however, you have never been to a *Star Trek* convention and have laughed at the documentary *Trekies* for any reason other than the fact that one of the subjects may have misquoted Captain Picard in a role playing exercise, you can probably stop reading here.

Shattered Universe is a *Star Trek*-themed deep space combat game. The majority of missions are a series of dog fights with numerous small enemy craft or a blitzkrieg on one central target.

The biggest compliment that can be paid to *Shattered Universe* is that it's competent: control is pretty tight, there are a variety of ships to fly and the story will be of interest to fans of the TV series.

The core *Star Trek* audience will be happy with the divergent plot line – gamers must indirectly battle the Federation as a (you guessed it) worm hole or "rift in the space / time continuum" puts now-Captain Sulu and his crew in (for two points?) an alternate universe. This alternate universe pits former allies against each other; Captain Chekov commands the Enterprise. If nothing else, this game is a real boon for b-rated *Star Trek* celebrities.

Gamers who are not fans of all things *Star Trek* but who still have a penchant for deep space combat may still find some enjoyment in *Shattered Universe*. Instead of steeping itself in *Star Trek* lore –



potentially confounding non fans – it weaves a fairly basic story using the prolific series as a jumping off point. The story is told in reasonably well done voiceovers, sometimes spectacular fly-bys and poorly executed character cut scenes where lame facial animation and unconvincing dialogue are reminiscent of games released early in the PS2's lifecycle.

– Andrew Moore-Crispin



Baldur's Gate: Dark Alliance 2

Publisher: Interplay Developer: Black Isle Studios



A fitting epitaph for Interplay's now-defunct Black Isle Studios, *Baldur's Gate: Dark Alliance II* is a pen and paper role-playing enthusiasts' fantasy come true. Although repetitious at times and not nearly as defining a title as its predecessor, the game nonetheless makes the third edition *Dungeons & Dragons* system suitable for mass consumption. As such a compelling draw, fans of the *Forgotten Realms* couldn't ask for more, save perhaps their very own enchanted broadsword or stunning Elven sidekick.

Conceptually a standard dungeon crawl, the game lets you choose from five predefined character archetypes – dark elf monk, human cleric, etc. – and leap right into the action. While skills, spells, feats and saving throws are all present and accounted for, a transparent user interface means the most strenuous task the game will ever demand of you is slapping a single button. That one can also easily swap out equipment, access vital statistical data and create items on the fly at workshops only serves as further testament to the title's ingenuity.

But despite support for two simultaneous adventurers and a non-linear campaign that will provide for weeks of continued play, not all is well with the title. Mostly combat-focused encounters mean you'll be bashing monsters ad nauseum, backtracking during sub-quests is common and targeting monsters isn't always simple. Phoned in dialogue from voice actors and nondescript sound effects don't do the product any favors either.

Shortcomings aside, when viewed from a grand perspective, the game remains a complete and utter success. Visually representing many aspects of the rule set it's based upon, while eliminating the tedium typically associated with bringing such elements into play, the program deserves sincere commendation for the effort.

Save yourself the trouble of renting, and purchase this out outright... as the bards say, it's the stuff that legends are made of.

– Scott Steinberg



Fallout: Brotherhood of Steel

Publisher/Developer: Interplay

Mutants, pirates and gangs, oh my!

For the first time console gamers can get a taste of this long standing PC series' grim sci-fi universe in *Fallout: Brotherhood of Steel*.

The premise involves a nuclear war that wipes out most of the world. All that's left of this *Mad Max*-like civilization are mutants, radioactive creatures and renegade pirates. Gamers must join the daring "Brotherhood" – the closest thing to law enforcement this world will ever know. The object of the game to keep the peace amongst the scavengers and to prevent a mysterious device from falling into the wrong hands.

Brotherhood is a more action-heavy journey compared to its PC predecessors. From knives to fusion-powered dual pistols to flame-throwers to incendiary grenades, gamers have access to more than 50 unique melee or ranged weapons as they roam these dangerous worlds from a third-person perspective.

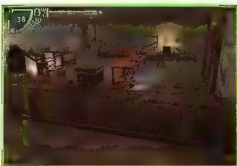
There are three customizable characters to choose from at the start of the game, each with his or her own skills. And as with most role-playing games, they will also grow in strength and ability over time and experience.

Multiple baddies onscreen means things can get pretty hairy, but *Brotherhood* includes a handy auto-targeting feature to effortlessly cycle through enemies with the push of a button. Some weapons don't have much of an effect on certain enemies, so a bit of strategy is required to get through sticky situations.

Shades of dark brown, grey and green are predominately used to portray this post-apocalyptic wasteland, with fairly open-ended, non-linear level design and missions. The developers also retained much of the dark humor found in the original *Fallout* games, so expect sharp dialogue and amusing cut-scene sequences to balance out the bleak premise.

Crave some company? Both the Xbox and PS2 versions of the game include an optional cooperative two-player mode on the same TV

– Marc Saltzman



Two years after *Sega GT 2002* revitalized a franchise that was well on its way to the bottom, Sega releases *Sega GT Online* exclusively for the Xbox at a bargain price with online compatibility through Xbox Live.

With an offline game that's nearly identical to the 2002 version, it's the online game that was supposed to be the next step for the franchise. Although the premise works, the rest of *Sega GT Online* falls flat in its online namesake. The interface is clumsy, slowdowns are common and there is no option to import your save file from the 2002 game to this one.

If you've never played the previous version, then the offline and online games could be worth it based on the bargain price. But at the same time, with *Sega GT Online*'s sloppy online presence, Sega misses a chance to give the franchise some momentum.

– Ted Krilovis

Publisher: Sega Developer: Namco Entertainment



Mafia

Publisher: Gathering Developer: Illusion Softworks



A port a year and a half in the making of the similarly titled PC game, *Mafia* weaves the story of a city cab driver's induction to and rise through the mobster world.

The developer puts a lot of focus on creating era-authentic vehicles and while I can't rightly claim to have driven a car from the days predating seatbelts and safety glass, the vehicles' generally slow acceleration, low top speeds and precarious centre of gravity at least feel believable ... if a little frustrating.

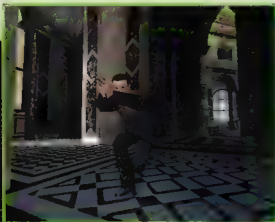
Mafia travels the same road as *The Getaway* in attempting to create a more realistic world vision as opposed to the over the top fantasy world of the *Grand Theft Auto* games. It helps lend the story line some of the credibility afforded to good movie plots, but makes the gameplay less about entertainment than experience.

Meanwhile, sketchy controls in the over the shoulder third person perspective shooting missions can make aiming an exercise in frustration.

Driving in the game puts a lot of focus on obeying traffic laws in order to escape the notice of police. Running red lights or exceeding the posted 60 MPH speed limit will likely put the police on your tail. The result is that running errands for a crime overlord can end up feeling a lot like running out to pick up milk as a law abiding citizen. Except of course that as a law abiding citizen, you wouldn't likely smash up cars in the parking lot with a baseball bat to settle a vendetta in the course of picking up said milk.

While I would personally have preferred a game with more action – even at a sacrifice to some historical detail – *Mafia* does exactly what it set out to do namely, to create an interesting and era-authentic (or at least believable) story.

– Andrew Moore-Crispin



Rallisport Challenge 2

Publisher: Microsoft Developer: Digital Illusions CE (DICE) Release date: May 4 2004

In sneaking a peak at a near-finished build of DICE's sequel to *Rallisport Challenge*, I immediately recalled how, at the age of five, I marveled at a dangerous toy called *Smash-Up Derby*. *Smash-Up Derby* involved launching a pick-up truck and a Beetle off of facing ramps and watching as they collided in mid-air. The vehicles would explode in an extremely satisfying manner, leaving a miniature accident wreckage on the living room floor.

As I tested *Rallisport Challenge 2*, watching bumpers, spoilers, doors, and hoods being busted up and eventually flying off as I crashed into everything in sight, I felt the same feeling of fulfillment I experienced with *Smash-Up Derby*. The game's damage models for cars are simply unparalleled, and the visuals in general are outstanding. The cars, in their undamaged state, merit favourable comparison to the likes of the graphically impressive vehicles found in *Project Gotham 2*, including dynamic effects such as true reflections and mud that slowly cakes the bodies and tail lights of cars.

The game's wonderfully detailed real-world environments have been much better realized than those of its predecessor. Unless players drive off of a cliff or into a lake we now appear to have the ability to freely explore off-road areas without being automatically reset back on the track. The weather effects, including snowflakes that briefly stick to windshields and torrential rains that greatly impede visibility, add to the game's authentic rally racing atmosphere.

More important than graphics is gameplay, and *Rallisport Challenge 2* appears to excel in this category as well. With five challenging circuits, online functionality that allows up to 16 players per race, extraordinary rally racing driving physics, and an array of reward-based challenges, die hard rally racing fans will be hard-pressed to find better value for their gaming dollar.

– Chad Sapieha



The Future of Cell Phone Gaming?



Cell phones were hyped in the months leading up to last year's E3 as the next videogame growth industry. Perhaps it was because console and PC gaming have traditionally been the focus of the expo or because the small handsets and resulting diminutive displays were lost in the orgy of light and sound put out by the big three and the major developers, but anyone expecting a major cell phone showing likely left the show floor wondering what the pre-show buzz was about.

Once consensus across the board seems to be that gaming on wireless handsets is predominantly directed at the two primary consumers of mobile. These two groups being youth for whom cell phones are as ubiquitous as landline telephones are to their parents, and mobile professionals. In either case, the motivation for playing a mobile game is generally diversionary; for example, to kill 10 minutes before a doctor's appointment, while commuting or waiting for a meeting.

"In the business arena I think there is a big plane for (cell phone gaming) and the reason I say that is because business people go to a lot of conventions, a lot of meetings and a lot of news fests and personally, that's where I play a lot of my games," said Ken Truffen, Director of Wireless Data & Business Development at Bell Mobility. "I say I'm testing, but I'm playing."

One vision for the future of cell phone gaming is for a unified gaming experience across different platforms. While a PC and console gamer play together or against each other, a cell phone gamer will play along at the same time.

"The next evolution – and it's not to far off; it's probably at the end of this year – is interactive gaming over the wireless network," says David Woodcock, Director of Product Development, Motorola Canada PCS. "there's no reason you couldn't extend that to the wired network, to PCs and dedicated gaming boxes."

"Because they're IP based and because the same people are making games for the cell phone and for the Xbox and Playstation, there's no reason to think that they won't converge someday," Truffen says.

It may sound farfetched given the practical limitations to gaming on a standard cell phone handset. However, if we look at the explosive growth of wireless games – going from text-based, trivia and similar games in 1999 to the current

generation of branded Java games and the success of the gaming industry as a whole – there's no reason to believe that it won't at least be attempted. The major variable, as with all consumer electronics, is consumers themselves; are cell phone users prepared to play more in-depth games as opposed to the usual \$5 downloaded diversion on a cell phone?

"The problem with statements like that (cell phone and dedicated

gaming consoles and PC playing together in the same space) is that they tend towards hype. They're not based upon what people are actually doing today," according to Jupiter Research wireless analyst Avi Greengart. "Is it realistic? Absolutely, but let's talk about time frame. Flying cars are realistic; the technology exists," he says, "but does that mean I'm likely to be driving a flying car next year?"

— Andrew Moore-Crispin

Read before you download

Most cell phones – with the exception of the brick-like monstrosities that were a status symbol in the 1980's – are capable of playing games of some sort. However, games in the current crop of somewhat deeper, graphically much richer and otherwise improved mobile games are generally optimized for a specific model or range of cell phones. To avoid disappointment and needless expense, be sure to check that the game you're contemplating plunking down an average \$5 or more for is compatible with your model of cell phone.

DoDonPachi



As 3D graphics and open-ended stories replace arcade action, top down perspective shooters seem to be the way of the past. Fortunately for fans of the genre, they're alive and kicking on cell

phones, thanks to the technical limitations of the platform. *DoDonPachi* demonstrates that there's still a place for the vertical scrolling shooter.

Tony Hawk Underground



Offering heavily scaled back, purely diversionary games born of popular

console and PC titles is a growing phenomenon in cell phone gaming. To that end Jamdat came out with *Tony Hawk's Underground*. *THUG* is available to anyone whose wireless service provider carries Jamdat games (read: just about everyone).

Tiger Woods 2004



EA Sports Tiger Woods PGA Tour Golf 2004 seems to be the perfect game for cell phone users. Using the three tap swing metre style and not requiring lightning fast reflexes or even constant

attention, *Tiger Woods 2004* sounds like the perfect candidate to help cell phone users while away a few minutes. Another Jamdat title.

HANDHELD

GAME BOY ADVANCE

Harvest Moon:

Friends of Mineral Town

There are a lot of potential life lessons available to be learned in *Harvest Moon: Friends of Mineral Town*, not least of which is that affection can be effectively bought – at least in part – with eggs boiled in a hot tub.

Part role playing game, part Japanese-style love connection, part farming sim and part tycoon game, *Harvest Moon* defies categorization.

Gamers make a new life in Mineral Town, raising livestock, growing crops (complete with tilling, planting, watering and harvesting), fishing, mining, cooking and competing in the occasional competitions for prizes and renown. All the while, purchasing, making or finding items to give any of the available girls in town in an attempt to woo.

With plenty to discover in and around town and on the farm, *HM:FoMT* is a good introduction for interested gamers who haven't played the series before. However, long-time fans will find that not too much has changed since the games first made their way to North America.

—AMC



Metroid

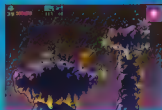
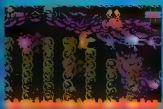
Zero Mission

Metroid Zero Mission is a retelling of the classic *Metroid* tale, first released on the NES in 1986, with a few new twists to both story and the current generation acoutrements like being able to aim diagonally, an easy save feature and GBA graphics.

Fans of the series who are always chomping at the bit for more *Metroid* won't be disappointed.

Zero Mission takes everything that was good about the original *Metroid* – well thought out level design, cool weapons, enemies, abilities and boss battles – and augments it with the improvements to gameplay that come with time – challenging but not impossible objectives, smooth control, detailed maps and enlightening if brief largely inanimate cut scenes. The original *Metroid* game is unlocked after *Zero Mission* is completed for gamers to compare and contrast. However, time has not been kind to the then innovative game.

—AMC



Red Faction

Publisher: THQ
Developer: Monkeysphere Games

If nothing else, the N-Gage has proven it's a better platform for first person shooters than any other handheld past or present. Thanks to the numerous buttons available to developers on the face of the phone slash game platform, gamers can strafe properly, change weapons fairly easily on the fly and have analogue controller-style simultaneous look and move functionality.

What we get is a scaled back homage to THQ's venerable *Red Faction* franchise that, despite some faults, is arguably the best handheld FPS to date. Gamers step into the view of a miner, attempting to escape the confines of a Mars mining operation, taking out any guard or official that gets in their way. Switch flipping and FPS maze crawling are the standard here and while a story objective driven game would be more fitting current tastes, *Red Faction* gets away without thanks to its more user friendly control scheme.

Graphically, this game is amazing for a handheld with well detailed environments and weapons, characters and enemies.

—AMC



N-GAGE

Splinter Cell

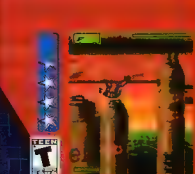
Publisher: Ubisoft
Developer: Gameloft

GBA owners with a copy of Ubisoft's handheld incarnation of *Splinter Cell* need pay no mind, as the N-Gage version is very much the same game, only with more button options and a slight graphical facelift. Handheld *Splinter Cell* is an excellent adaptation of the stealth espionage found in the console versions of Sam Fisher's escapades. A lot is understandably lost in the translation from 3 to 2D, but the game is instantly recognizable.

Levels require differing amounts of stealth from missions where if Sam Fisher is detected, he's withdrawn and the mission is deemed a failure to those where collateral damage is just the cost of doing espionage. The occasional "run like hell, the building is on fire" level is thrown in for good measure.

Clever adaptations like a spy camera that allows gamers to see what lies ahead (complete with the viewing area of security cameras displayed in red) without being spotted and 2D lock picking make handheld *Splinter Cell* a worthy younger sibling to its venerable 3D older brother.

—AMC



DVD NEW RELEASES

- INTOLERABLE CRUELTY
- LION KING 1 1/2
- RUNAWAY JURY
- DICKIE ROBERTS:
FORMER CHILD STAR
- MAMBO ITALIANO
- SPY KIDS 3D: GAME OVER
- GOOD BOY
- SCHOOL OF ROCK
- LOONEY TUNES:
BACK IN ACTION
- CAT IN THE HAT

DVD DESTINATION

DVD COMING SOON

- THE RUNDOWN
- GOTHIKA
- SOMETHING'S GOTTA GIVE
- BROTHER BEAR
- THE TEXAS CHAINSAW
MASSACRE
- THE MATRIX REVOLUTIONS
- CHEAPER BY THE DOZEN
- KILL BILL VOL. 1
- TIMELINE
- OUR AMERICA



HOT NEW DVD'S COMING SOON!

THE RUNDOWN AVAILABLE March 23, 2004

**Cast: The Rock,
Seann William Scott,
Christopher Walken**

When Travis, the son of an underworld kingpin, disappears in the Amazon in search of a priceless artifact, Beck, the kingpin's retrieval expert, is sent to get him. Despite their hostility and their love for the same woman, the two must eventually join forces to fight the evil head of a gold mining corporation who is after the same treasure.

DVD Features: Commentary, deleted scenes, 5 featurettes, cast & filmmakers' bios and more

Rated: 14A

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DR. SUESS' CAT IN THE HAT AVAILABLE MARCH 16, 2004

Cast: Mike Meyers, Alex Baldwin, Kelly Preston

It starts with two kids on a cold, cold wet day. The mom is at work and they've no games to play! Then in walks the fun in the form of a Cat who pulls out the laughs from the brim of his hat. Things really get wild when the Cat and his crew (who go by the name of Thing One and Thing Two) take over the house of Conrad and Sally in this fine family film that's right up your alley!

DVD features: Deleted scenes, outtakes, "Dance along with the Cat" featurette and more.

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DVDS & GAMES

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GAME RENTALS

PS2

- 1] MAFIA
- 2] NEED FOR SPEED: UNDERGROUND
- 3] TRUE CRIME: STREETS OF LA SONIC HEROES
- 4] TONY HAWK'S UNDERGROUND
- 5] CHAMPIONS OF NORRATH: REALMS OF EVERQUEST
- 6] MANHUNT
- 7] LORD OF THE RINGS: RETURN OF THE KING
- 8] BALDUR'S GATE: DARK ALLIANCE
- 10] THE SIMS BUSTIN' OUT



BROTHER BEAR AVAILABLE MARCH 30, 2004

Voice Talent: Joaquin Phoenix, Rick Moranis, Dave Thomas

Kenaa is a young Native American boy whose father is killed by a mother bear protecting her cubs. With revenge in mind, Kenaa sets out into the woods only to find himself magically transformed into a bear himself. Seeing the world through the eyes of his prey, Kenaa is forced to learn a lesson about nature and life.

DVD Features: Fully animated outtakes, deleted scenes, 2 exciting new games, sing along and much more!

WALT DISNEY HOME ENTERTAINMENT; Rated G



THE MATRIX REVOLUTIONS AVAILABLE APRIL 6, 2004

Keanu Reeves, Laurence Fishburne, Carrie-Anne Moss

It is a dark time for the world. Neo is trapped in a coma state while the citizens of Zion, the last city of mankind, defend themselves against the massive invasion of the machines. As the machines press toward Zion they are unaware of the force within the Matrix that has slowly been growing more and more powerful: Smith. The only hope for the survival of both worlds is Neo. There must be one final battle and the outcome will decide the fate and future of both races. Everything that has a beginning has an end.

DVD Features: 5:1 Dolby Digital

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CHEAPER BY THE DOZEN AVAILABLE APRIL 6, 2004

Cast: Steve Martin, Bonnie Hunt, Tom Welling

Tom and Kate Baker move their unusually large family of 12 to Chicago after Tom accepts his dream job as coach of his alma-mater's football team. Kate also gets her dream of getting her book published. With Kate away on her book tour and his own newly complicated life and busy schedule heating up, Tom must come up with inventive ways of parenting to keep all twelve kids in line.

DVD Features: Director commentary, 3 featurettes, 6 deleted scenes and more

WALT DISNEY HOME ENTERTAINMENT; All Rights Reserved. Rated G



THE SKULLS III AVAILABLE MARCH 9, 2004

Cast: Clare Kramer, Bryce Johnson, Barry Bostwick

Four years ago Taylor Brooks found her brother Sam dead during his initiation period into Yale's elite secret society, The Skulls. Now Taylor herself is a Yale undergraduate, as well as a Skull, and finds herself in the position of being interrogated about the murder of a fellow student.

DVD features: Theatrical trailer, cast biographies and production notes

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TIMELINE AVAILABLE APRIL 13, 2004

Cast: Paul Walker, Frances O'Connor, Gerard Butler

An archeological professor invents a machine that can transmit three-dimensional objects through space, and inadvertently transports himself to 14th century France. His team of students gets trapped when attempting to retrieve him and must survive one of the most violent battles in world history before making it back to the 21st century alive

DVD features: 5:1 Dolby Digital

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XBOX

- 1] TOM CLANCY'S RAINBOW SIX 3
- 2] NEED FOR SPEED: UNDERGROUND
- 3] UNREAL II: THE AWAKENING
- 4] SONIC HEROES
- 5] TRUE CRIME: STREETS OF LA
- 6] PROJECT GOTHAM RACING II
- 7] GRAND THEFT AUTO: VICE CITY
- 8] BALDUR'S GATE: DARK ALLIANCE
- 9] LORD OF THE RINGS: RETURN OF THE KING
- 10] COUNTER STRIKE

GAMECUBE

- 1] FINAL FANTASY: CRYSTAL CHRONICLES
- 2] MARIO KART: DOUBLE DASH!
- 3] SONIC HEROES
- 4] MARIO PARTY 5
- 5] LORD OF THE RINGS: RETURN OF THE KING
- 6] NEED FOR SPEED: UNDERGROUND
- 7] TRUE CRIME: STREETS OF LA
- 8] MARIO PARTY 4
- 9] SUPER SMASH BROS.
- 10] KIRBY AIR RIDE

Gangland

Publisher: Whiptail Interactive **Developer:** MediaMasters

History buffs who think mobsters like Al Capone had an easy job can put their mouse where their mouth is – *Gangland* is an action-heavy strategy/sim that can best be described as *The Sims* meets *The Sopranos*.

The grim premise is as follows: you've just arrived in the United States with your three Sicilian brothers and your ultimate objective is to hunt them down and kill them. Needless-to-say, this game ain't child's play so take heed to the ESRB Mature rating on the box.

At the start of the game, you meet with your uncle Vincenzo (who also happens to be the neighbourhood mob boss) to perform seedy tasks for him, such as setting up extortion rackets, gun running, bootlegging and "whacking" stool pigeons. All in a day's work.

Later on in the game, players get tougher assignments – and more action-packed ones – including blowing up buildings and snuffing rival gangs via drive-bys (yes, there are drivable vehicles in the game). Those familiar with the *Grand Theft Auto* games will also find the mission-branching structure a recognizable one as players work their way to the top of the underworld. An interesting RPG element lets players (and their "family") grow in skills and attributes over time. This is a good thing because for some odd reason, enemies in *Gangland* can take a good 10 to 15 bullets to keep them down. Because of this, the stealthy option to completing objectives may be the smarter one.

The game is played from a top-down "isometric" point of view in a handful of indoor and outdoor environments with smooth transitions between them. The mouse and keyboard are used together for navigation and managing resources.

Other notable features include a unique event engine that generates non-linear plotlines each time it's played, while the multiplayer mode supports up to eight gamers over the Net.

– Marc Saltzman



MATURE
ESRB



Jack the Ripper

Publisher: The Adventure Company **Developer:** Galilea Multimedia

Players obsessed with action-oriented games might be surprised to learn that point-and-click adventures are alive and well. *Jack the Ripper* is the latest entry in the genre, providing players with a strong narrative, contextual puzzles, and accessible though somewhat cyclical gameplay.

Players take on the role of rookie reporter James Palmer in early 20th century New York. He's been assigned to investigate and report on a series of killings that are eerily similar to those attributed to London's so-called Jack the Ripper. With notepad in hand, Palmer examines crime scenes, interviews witnesses, leafs through police reports, and, at the end of each day, files a story with his editor.

As each day begins you'll learn about a new murder and then systematically visit every location available and interview anyone willing to talk to you until you've satisfied the requirements for the story to progress. Puzzle solving is generally limited to simple circumstance-specific dilemmas, like how to enter a building when no one answers the door.

The game's strongest element is its story, delivered through professional voice actors working from a good script. Spooky cinematic sequences occasionally interrupt the investigation of crime scenes, offering clues to the murderer's identity.

Jack the Ripper's graphics suffice but don't break new ground. The lip-syncing is a bit off and the characters animate stiffly, but the settings are full of era-specific details like black mechanical typewriters and old fashioned theatre posters. Regrettably, the environments get recycled too often; revisiting the same locations multiple times becomes monotonous.

Jack the Ripper provides players with passive gameplay that feels less like a videogame and more like a book or movie. However, the overall experience is still pleasant enough to earn a positive assessment – so long as players know what they're getting into.

– Chad Sapieha



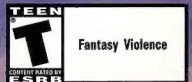
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